

A Night of Drinking Turns Deadly

By Ken Testorff,
Naval Safety Center

John Q. Sailor and three shipmates left their barracks rooms between 1430 and 1600 one afternoon and went to play dominoes and to drink beer. Later, a shipmate from a different command joined them, and all five left the base in two vehicles. Their destination was a nightclub in a nearby town.

During the evening, the five split up inside the crowded, two-story club. Occasionally, they would meet in smaller groups. One of the shipmates eventually realized he had lost track of John Q. and asked the others to help look for him. What they didn't know was that about 0120, club management had summoned a local police officer making security checks to have their friend removed from the premises.

The police officer asked John Q. several questions, including if he had any friends with him. He said he didn't. Then, pointing in the direction of a nearby apartment complex, he told the officer what base he was from. The officer watched as John Q. walked off in the direction of the apartment complex. The officer noted that John Q. didn't smell of alcohol and didn't have any problem standing or walking, so he let him go.

About 0130, two of the shipmates departed the club and returned to their base. They assumed John Q. already had done the same. The other two shipmates stayed until the club closed; then they waited for John Q. in the parking lot until the police made everyone leave. They checked into a hotel, thinking that John Q. had left the club with a girl or had been arrested.

The next morning, these two shipmates called the police station and were told their friend had not been arrested the previous night. They drove back to

Pedestrians should
avoid railroad
tracks, especially
after they've had
a few too many to
drink



the base, assuming that John Q. had gotten a ride back with someone else, or that he would contact them and ask for a lift.

Unfortunately, they were mistaken. At 0420, police had responded to a train hitting a pedestrian about nine-tenths of a mile from the nightclub. That pedestrian turned out to be John Q. According to reports, he had a BAC of 0.20.

What lessons were learned from this tragedy? Individuals assume responsibility for their own actions when they decide to drink. Always use the buddy system. ❏



photo composite

Another Wasted Life

By Ken Testorff,
Naval Safety Center

It was New Year's Eve, and a small group of friends had gathered to celebrate. Among the partyers was a 42-year-old lieutenant commander who had had too much to drink.

In the course of the evening, he had stepped outside several times to smoke a cigarette. When party guests realized they hadn't seen him for a spell, they looked outside for him but to no avail. They then searched the neighborhood but again were unsuccessful. They felt certain he had left the party on foot because they found the keys to his rental car and hotel room on a table in the house.

About 0022, a motorist called 911 to report seeing a man staggering along the right shoulder of an interstate about five and one-third miles from the house. Before anyone could respond to this call, another motorist, returning home from work, encountered the man. She was driving about 60 mph when he suddenly appeared directly in front of her car, a compact sedan. Despite her evasive actions, the right front bumper of her car hit the man, and he came flying through the passenger side of the windshield.

Paramedics pronounced the victim dead at the scene at 0050. An autopsy report showed a blood-alcohol content of 0.15 percent. According to the statement of one witness, the victim was feeling depressed about an impending divorce and may have been taking anti-inflammatory medications for a back injury the day of the mishap. Compounding the problem was the fact the victim reportedly had only four hours of sleep in the 24 hours before the mishap. He also was wearing black clothing at the time he stepped in front of the car.

As the OinC of a shipboard military department, the victim and his assigned personnel, according to superiors, were consistently counseled about responsible drinking in off-duty activities. It would appear he perhaps missed some of the counseling sessions. In any event, the bottom line is the same—another wasted life. ❏